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### [Review of] Reading Smell in Eighteenth-Century Fiction by Emily C. Friedman

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#1689 Reading Smell in Eighteenth-Century Fiction by Emily C. Friedman. Lewisburg:  
Bucknell University Press; Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. xiv+194pp. US\$85. ISBN 978-  
1-61148-752-7

Emily Friedman has presented us here with an enormous wealth of information about smells, fair and foul, addictive and absent, in the long eighteenth century. Sampling texts ranging chronologically from Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* through Austen's juvenilia, she traces scents and the reactions they provoked across a huge number of novels and plays, setting them carefully in their richly-evoked historical context.

Outlining the difficulty of approaching such an evanescent thing as scent in literary texts, let alone the challenge of recovering its long-ago significance, Friedman explains both the inevitable incompleteness of her recovery of eighteenth-century smells and the importance of her attempt. Her stated aim is to explore "the collection of meanings that accreted around scents in the period, and how those meanings formed a vocabulary that writers could draw on" (4). In the end, she finds no consistent thread of meaning around particular smells, and thus no coherent vocabulary for scent. The nature of the project seems to have precluded a focused argument about the significance of smells, driving the book instead toward an exploration of instances of smells and smelling gathered together under general rubrics. In themselves, these instances are often funny, charming or revealing, but the absence of an overarching narrative detailing the cultural meaning of eighteenth-century smells felt, in the end, a little unsatisfying. Friedman's excellent concluding argument about the middle-class gentility of scentlessness seemed to suggest the possibility of an argumentative thread that didn't quite make a clear appearance earlier in the book.

Chapters on tobacco ("Clouds of Smoke, Huffs of Snuff"), smelling-salts ("Running to the Smelling-Bottle"), body odour ("The Smell of Other People"), and sulfur ("The Age of Sulfur") gather together illuminating examples of eighteenth-century stinks. Passing readily beneath the critic's radar, these instances of smells, when brought together as they are here, grant us an enriched understanding of how powerful a role they play in the newly sensual and tactile worlds of eighteenth-century fiction. Friedman's survey of tobacco-use crosses class and gender lines, assessing the varied cultural response to this new and "new-world" commodity. Smelling-bottles, so closely associated with feminine fragility, are revealed not simply to have their more obvious affiliation with affectation and overrefinement, but also to have medicinal uses as plague preventatives. In fact, Friedman shows, smelling-bottles were often used as smell-blockers, interrupting the relationship of fictional characters to their over-scented worlds. Her chapter on personal stinks, focused appropriately on Swift and Smollett, explores the class associations of particular bodily odours. Friedman notes acutely that Swift associates Gulliver's disordered "olfactory categories" (74) with his loss of reason: "Gulliver's loss of mental stability and identity is at last a failure of his most instinctive sense: his sense of smell" (73). Next, a chapter on sulfur, the smell of which is the brimstone of hell, explains its further associations with the industrial revolution and with the spectacularly destructive Lisbon earthquake of 1755. The book's conclusion ("The Great Unscenting"), offers readings of Richardson and Austen, suggesting the virtues of cleanliness and the unscented domesticity of new middle-class values.

The orderliness and care with which Friedman has gathered together this immensely important body of evidence makes for a pleasurable read. This illuminating topic, so timely in its address to the importance of the senses and the role of material experience in literary historical writing, has been treated with great sensitivity. The range and depth of Friedman's reading, and

the context she has brought to bear here makes the value of this material eminently clear. The book's wide and thorough survey, supported by solid historical detail, owes its methodology to cultural studies. And, perhaps inevitably, it suffers from the fault sometimes associated with this school of criticism: it has a tendency to fall short in the depth and nuance of its analysis in favour of presenting a greater volume of data.

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